

## **WEEK 5: TYPES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

Direct reference and information services are classified for front-end engagement with library users. These services are provided for optimum utilisation of library and information resources and to provide guidance to users. However, these services are carried out based on the policy of the library, the nature of the information resources, the users, knowledge and skills of the reference librarian.

**Definition and Meaning of Direct Reference service:** A reference and information service is considered to be direct when it is rendered to a client without a barrier or interface between the librarian and the clients. In this form of service, there is room for interaction between the information worker and the client irrespective of the medium of communication. It has to do with person to person relationship. It involves answering users' questions, interview, and providing them with needed information or service. According to Ranganathan, this type of reference service is often finished in a very short time, in a moment if possible. The reference staff is able to answer the inquiry in a very short time, may be at times immediately. This type of service is more or less fact finding. Normally, sources of information used for fact finding consist of reference books of different types. These include encyclopaedia, dictionaries, yearbooks, biographical dictionaries, geographical dictionaries, etc. Direct reference and information services are defined as the service rendered to users physically and remotely within specified time possible. This service is characterised by direct contact with the users. It is responsive services that are provided in response to requests for assistance in finding answers to specific questions and literacy instructions.

**Types of Direct Reference and Information Services** Within these philosophies and functions of the reference librarian, several particular types of direct reference and information service have been developed. Some common forms include readers' advisory, ready reference, research consulting, bibliographic, instruction, literacy programmes, outreach and marketing.

**i. Readers' Advisory** Readers' advisory is the process of recommending information sources to library users. Any reference librarian who recommends sources based on the user's needs is in fact doing readers' advisory service. Whether a book, database, or website, the librarian chooses the source for the user based on the librarian's skill level and the nature of the user's question. The

public librarian who recommends one fiction writer over another, the academic librarian who recommends one subject database over another, and the special librarian who recommends one journal over another, are all involved in readers' advisory work.

ii. **Ready Reference:** Ready reference is the provision of short, factual answers to highly specific questions. Answers to these questions are verifiable as accurate or inaccurate. The following are examples of ready-reference questions: "What is the population of Nigeria?" "How many mango trees were grown in Kaduna State in 2016?" "What is the address of the headquarters of Microsoft?" Answering ready-reference questions is the popular image of the reference librarian. However, ready reference has never been the primary function of reference service and is rapidly becoming an even smaller component of the reference librarian's duties. In the past, reference librarians did more ready reference simply because the sources required to answer such questions were in library collections and not in the hands of the users. With the development of the web and search tools such as Yahoo! and Google, users have the tools to find this type of information on their own. As a result, there is less need to consult a librarian for ready reference. Ready reference is more common in public libraries than in academic or special libraries, but it is in decline in all types of libraries.

iii. **Research Consulting:** This is a more common form of reference service in which the reference librarian assists users with research questions. In this case, the librarian may suggest sources, search terms, and pathways that will lead to material relevant to the research project. These questions do not have single, factual answers but have many possible results that vary depending on the researcher's interests and needs. The following are some examples of research questions: "What is the effect of pesticides on apple production?" • "What is the state of literacy in Nigeria?" • "How did Microsoft grow into a company that dominates the information industry?" With research questions, there is not one single answer that can be verified as categorically correct or incorrect. Instead, a wide range of possible approaches, search strategies, potential sources are available, and each leading in a different direction. The role of the librarian as a research consultant is to find out what aspects of the problem the user is interested in and to suggest possible search strategies that will lead the user towards the best solution. As a research consultant, the librarian may get the user started in the research, but the user will do most of the searching. The user may

return several times during the process. Research consulting is more common in academic and research libraries than in other types of library, but it is becoming the dominant form of reference service in all libraries.

iv. **Instructional Service:** The reference librarian provides instruction to readers about the library. That instructional role continues well into the 21st century. Instruction tends to take two forms: direct and indirect. Direct instruction is characterised by the librarian communicating directly to the user and is delivered through any of a number of channels. It may come in a one-on-one situation in which the librarian teaches the user as they work together on a query; it may be done in a voluntary group environment, through workshops or classes that teach general or specific skills to those who choose to attend; or it may be a required part of a specific course or assignment in which the instructor wants all students to use library resources. Required instruction is more common in academic libraries, whereas voluntary and one-on-one instructions are features of reference service in all libraries. Reference librarians also provide indirect instruction. In indirect instruction, the librarian does not communicate directly with the user, but communicates through instructional tools. In order to assist users with common problems, librarians write guides or pathfinders that describe how and where to approach various research problems. Some guides cover specific issues such as how to use the catalogue, a database, or a specific reference source. Other guides may be directed at a specific discipline such as bibliographies or web pages of useful materials in music or education. Guides may be in print or electronic form and are updated as needed. Indirect instruction is provided in anticipation of user needs.

V. **Literacy Programmes:** In addition to providing resources for the literate segment of society, libraries have continued to play a role in education itself. Many librarians conduct literacy programmes, which are designed to teach reading skills to those members of the community who have not acquired such skills through other channels. Frequently, these programmes are aimed at adults who have not completed their schooling, for who English is a second language, or who are new immigrants to the community. Literacy programmes are most common in public libraries. These programmes continue the historic role of the public library in educating members of the communities that they serve.

**vi. Outreach and Marketing:** Librarians today have gone beyond this passive approach of waiting for users to come to the library and now work to generate interest in their communities. Academic and public libraries frequently have staff whose primary responsibility is to work with specific segments of the community to increase library awareness and use within those populations. In the academic environment, the library may target outreach efforts at specific disciplines or departments, or toward specific types of users such as faculty or graduate students. In public libraries, outreach is often directed at segments of the community such as teens, senior citizens, minorities, or members of clubs or interest groups. Outreach activities continue to grow in libraries and are often a part of the reference librarian's duties.

**vii. Information Service:** This type of service may range from answering simple questions to supplying information based on users' information search in the library's collection. The character and extent of library and information service may vary with the kind of library, level of users, the skills, competence, and professional training of the reference librarian providing the information service. Information service is provided in terms of information sought by the library patrons. Usually, the client is not concerned with the source of the information. Users under this category may include uneducated farmers who wish to know something about weather forecast or a layman from a rural community who may just want to know the name of his Local Government Chairman. It will be ridiculous for a reference librarian to start providing the client with the information sources rather than sourcing for the answer and providing it to the client.

**vii. Referral Service** This type of service has to do with directing or guiding library users to what they want in the library as well as on how to use library information resources. This may be in the form of giving explanation on the use of library information access tools. This service is also called the last resort for the reference librarian, having exhausted all avenues within his reach to render reference service to the client. The client is referred to another library where he/she could be assisted.

**viii. Translation service:** This service entails the rendering of information in foreign or unknown language to a library client into a language that they understand. This service is very necessary

especially where a library houses so many relevant materials in foreign language not understood by majority of its users.

## **INDIRECT REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

Indirect reference services are all the services that are carried out behind the scene. Indirect reference and information services are behind the scene activity that the reference librarian engages himself in order to meet the information needs of the user. Such services are enjoyed by the clients without knowing who in the library provided them. Such services include acquisition of reference information resources, supervision, and compilation of information retrieval aids and their administration. In essence, anything that contributes to a successful reference and information work which is carried out without the client or user knowing when or who prepared the service. In another literature, this type of service is classified as long range service because of the time it takes in preparing and to respond with the appropriate information sought to the library client.

**Types of Indirect Reference and Information Services:** Under this category the following reference and information services are classified:

i. **Subject Specialists:** Many large libraries hire librarians to be specialists in a specific subject field or discipline. These librarians immerse themselves in the subject area, usually selecting materials for the library's collection as well as assisting users with specialised research. Although subject specialists can be assigned to cover any discipline, they are most common in areas that society sees as requiring more specialised knowledge to succeed, such as law, medicine, the sciences, and business. Subject specialists often have advanced degrees within their field of specialisation. They work closely with researchers in the community and handle very complex questions. Subject specialists are most often found in academic libraries, large public libraries, and special libraries.

ii. **Bibliographic Verification and Citation:** Bibliographic verification is the process of reading, identifying, and interpreting citations to information sources. Those sources include books, journals, theses, web pages, manuscripts, or any other form of publication. In the process of verification, the librarian usually finds other reference sources that cite the same publication,

correct errors, and determines where to find the desired information. As information becomes more and more complex, verification is a growing activity for reference librarians. This is the primary activity of interlibrary loan librarians whose entire operation depends on citations. A newer function related to bibliographic verification is helping users to correctly cite the information sources that they have used. Students, researchers, and the general public need to be able to provide accurate citations to their sources so that others will be able to find those sources. With the wide range of available citation styles such as American Psychological Association (APA) which is used as a formatting style by social sciences for citation, Modern Language Association (MLA) which is a style for writing papers and essays and its mostly used in Arts and Humanities for citation; Chicago (from The Chicago Manual of Style) and an ever-growing number of formats, users find it increasingly difficult to accurately cite the information sources that they use. In addition to the relatively new format of the web, users are very confused about citations. Aiding users with citations are a rapidly growing function of the reference librarian. This is extremely common in academic and school libraries where students are learning how to cite material. However, citations are common areas of query in public and special libraries as well. Reference librarians are often responsible for maintaining good standards in citations and references.

**iii. Interlibrary Loan:** Interlibrary loan is the process of sharing information materials between libraries. One library may loan a physical item to another library for a specific period of time or may copy the original and deliver it to the requesting library. Interlibrary loan is a common service in most libraries of all types because it extends the range of material available to users beyond the home library's collection. Most libraries belong to consortia that determine which materials may be borrowed or photocopied. Libraries regularly exchange information materials in all formats using established codes and copyright guidelines. When cooperative union catalogues such as Online Computer Library Catalogue (OCLC) were adapted for interlibrary loan, the process was made significantly easier, and the volume of traffic among lending libraries rose tremendously. Interlibrary loan librarians spend a lot of time doing bibliographic verification.

**iv. Document Delivery Service (DDS):** This is an indirect reference service that involves the physical or electronic delivery of a document from a library's collection to a library user base on request. These documents could be a part of a book, or softcopy of information resources

depending on the library users' request. The requested document can be delivered at the circulation desk within the library, or by post to the user's address, or through e-mail.

v. **Access Tools:** In order to ease access to reference information collections, the librarian need to prepare special information access tools such as bibliographies, abstracts, indexes, collection list, etc. Anything that can facilitate easy access and retrieval of reference information resources is known as an access tool.

vi. **Technical Services:** These include such activities as cataloguing, classification, and all other routine functions like labeling and shelving as well as auxiliary duties. Auxiliary duties consist of filing, shelf maintenance, recording keeping, watching over readers and other chores necessary for the cooperate existence of any reference section in a library.

vii. **Current Awareness Service (CAS):** This is concern with the dissemination of up-to-date information to library users. It includes display of newly acquired information resources in the various fields of library users. It is like sending message alerts to users about latest publications and developments in the library.

viii. **Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI):** This is a personalised service directed to library users according to their required needs. It is an enhancement of current awareness service that involves matching information or documents or resources with the interest of each users of the library.

## **WEEK 6: INDEXING AND ABSTRACTING SERVICES.**

Indexing and Abstracting (I&A) services are indispensable access tools and a critical part of the reference function of a library. Their primary role is to bridge the gap between the vast amount of published literature (information explosion) and the specific information needs of the user.

I&A services are essential tools for information professionals in the reference process, because it enables reference librarians to locate, evaluate, and provide access to the vast global output of scholarly communication. Indexing and abstracting services effectively transform primary literature from a scattered, unorganized mass into an accessible, searchable, and navigable body of knowledge, directly supporting the core mission of reference service: connecting the user with the information they need.

### **A good I&A service should be:**

- i. Accurate:** Bibliographic details and content summaries must be correct.
- ii. Timely (Low Time Lag):** Should report new literature quickly after its publication.
- iii. Comprehensive:** Should cover a wide range of relevant source material.
- iv. Easy to Use:** Should have a clear arrangement, good cross-references, and effective search capabilities.

**Indexing Service:** This is a service that produces an index. An index is a systematic guide to the entries (e.g., subjects, authors, titles, concepts) contained in a collection of documents or a document itself, usually arranged alphabetically, with references (citations) to show where each item is located in the original source.

**Abstracting Service:** This is a service that produces an abstract. An abstract is a brief, objective summary of the content and scope of a document, often accompanied by full bibliographic details, allowing a user to determine the document's relevance without reading the full text.

### **Core Functions and Objectives of Abstracting and Indexing Service**

- i. Bibliographic Control:** To systematically list and organize the world's scholarly literature, especially articles in periodicals (micro documents) which are difficult to access through standard library catalogs.



**ii. Current Awareness Service (CAS):** To keep scholars and information users abreast of current literature and latest developments in their fields of interest by regularly publishing new entries.

**iii. Retrospective Search:** To facilitate the search for information published in the past on a specific subject, allowing for comprehensive literature reviews over time (e.g., through annual or cumulative indexes).

**iv. Information Retrieval:** To serve as the primary tool for locating relevant documents efficiently by subject, author, or other access points.

**v. Time-Saving:** To save the user's time and effort by quickly guiding them to the most pertinent sources (via indexing) and helping them decide if a source is worth reading in full (via abstracting).

**vi. Overcoming Language Barriers:** Many services provide entries and abstracts in a common language (e.g., English) for documents published in other languages.

### Types of Indexes

Indexing can be categorized based on the method of content analysis or the type of access point provided.

**i. Author Index:** Lists documents by the name of the author(s).

**ii. Subject Index:** Lists documents under standardized subject terms.

**iii. Citation Index:** Lists documents that cite a particular author or article. Useful for forward-tracking research influence.

- *Example:* Web of Science, Scopus.

**iv. Back-of-Book Index:** An index for a single monograph, listing terms and their page numbers.

**v. Periodical Index:** Indexes articles published in a range of journals, magazines, or newspapers.

### Types of Abstracts

Abstracts are typically categorized by the information they present:

**i. Informative Abstract:** Provides a concise, objective summary of the entire study, including the main purpose, methodology, key findings/results, and conclusion/recommendations. It acts as a miniature version of the original document.

- *Length:* Usually longer (e.g., 250-500 words).

- *Use:* Highly valuable, as it often provides enough information to satisfy a limited information need without consulting the original document.

**ii. Descriptive (Indicative) Abstract:** Describes the main topics and scope of the document but *does not* include the results or conclusions. It only *indicates* what the document is about.

- *Length:* Usually shorter (e.g., under 100 words).
- *Use:* Helps the user decide if the full text is relevant, but doesn't provide substantive content.

**iii. Critical Abstract (or Review):** Rarely produced by a general abstracting service. It not only summarizes but also evaluates the document, commenting on its validity, scope, and significance.

## Modern I&A Services and Databases

Historically, I&A services were published in print form (e.g., *Index Medicus*, *Chemical Abstracts*). Today, the services are predominantly available as sophisticated online databases or bibliographic databases.

## Key Features of Modern I&A Databases

- **Advanced Search Capabilities:** Utilize Boolean operators, phrase searching, truncation, and field-specific searching (author, title, subject, abstract).
- **Interoperability:** Often include direct links to the full-text of the articles (if the library subscribes to the primary source) and link-outs to related documents (e.g., citing articles).
- **Citation Tracking:** Enable users to see which other papers an article has cited and which papers have cited the article, facilitating comprehensive research.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Cover vast amounts of literature across many disciplines or focus deeply on a specific subject area.

## Examples of Major I&A Databases

- **Subject-Specific:** PubMed (Biomedical), PsycINFO (Psychology), INSPEC (Physics/Engineering).
- **Multi-Disciplinary/Citation:** Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (a search engine but acts as a de facto I&A service).